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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE, NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/WATERS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/08/2017
TAGS: [PREL](#) [KWBG](#) [PBTS](#) [KPAL](#) [PINR](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: SEVERAL CENTRAL WEST BANK CHECKPOINTS REMOVED OR
EASED; NEW CHECKPOINT ADDED NEAR JERUSALEM

REF: A. A) 06 JERUSALEM 5032
[B](#). B) 06 TEL AVIV 4995
[C](#). C) 12/29 JEREOS-DANIN EMAIL

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (S) Summary. Following discussion on easing movement restrictions inside the West Bank between PA President Mahmud Abbas (Abu Mazen) and Israeli PM Ehud Olmert, Poloff surveyed the changes in Palestinian access/movement in the Nablus/Salfit/Ramallah area on January 5. The changes do not allow unimpeded access between Palestinian towns or alter restrictions on entering Jerusalem, but some duplicative checkpoints and roadblocks have been removed, and age/permit restrictions at some visited checkpoints have been lifted. Palestinian security contacts downplayed the significance of the changes, but confirmed removal and easing of inspections at several intermediate checkpoints. Consistent with their reservations, Post has received reports that two checkpoints removed by January 5 were partially reestablished by January [1](#)8. The MoD opened a back-to-back terminal for Palestinian produce in the northern Jordan Valley. The IDF opened a new checkpoint near Jerusalem, consistent with the MoD's stated intent to tighten access from the West Bank to Jerusalem and Israel while it loosens restrictions inside the West Bank. End summary.

Abbas-Olmert: Agreement
on Easing WB Checkpoints

[1](#)2. (S) President Abbas told the Consul General December 24 that he had supplied PM Olmert a list of 15 checkpoints that are particularly onerous for Palestinians, during his December 23 meeting with Olmert in Jerusalem. Olmert had agreed to take action to improve the situation, he said, without offering specific commitments. (See Ref A). Per Refs B and C, on December 26, Israeli MoD representatives said that in the first stage, the IDF will remove 11 checkpoints and reduce another 16 to random checks, while opening Bardalah checkpoint in the northern Jordan Valley for agricultural goods.

NSF Verifies Reductions,
But Downplays Importance

[1](#)3. (C) On January 3, West Bank National Security Forces (NSF) commander BG Nidal al-Asuli told ConGen PolSpec that the IDF called the Nablus NSF's District Coordination Office (DCO) and informed them that procedures would be modified at 16 checkpoints. Al-Asuli said that the NSF had verified the information, but on the whole was not impressed by the checkpoint modifications. The changes did not provide free movement between any Palestinian cities, and none of the

checkpoints were actually dismantled, he said. He thought that movement outside of Nablus would be somewhat expedited, however, as the IDF had stopped manning several intermediate checkpoints.

Ground Survey: Some Checkpoints Removed;

14. (C) On January 5, Poloff surveyed changes in Palestinian access/movement in the Nablus/Salfit/Ramallah area. The changes do not allow unimpeded access between Palestinian towns or alter restrictions on entering Jerusalem, but several duplicative checkpoints and roadblocks have been removed. Age/permit restrictions at some visited checkpoints have been lifted.

'Atara: Movement from Ramallah Eased

15. (C) The 'Atara checkpoint was not manned January 5, and Palestinian-plated vehicles passed without stopping from Bir Zayt (Area B, north of and accessible from Ramallah). An Israeli Border Police jeep remained on site, but did not stop traffic. Opening 'Atara is significant as it allows Palestinians to reach Salfit via local roads, and allows passage to Nablus by crossing only one checkpoint (Huwwara), instead of two (Note: Za'atara checkpoint at Tappuah junction only inspects southbound traffic. End note).

Yitzhar CP Abandoned,
Then Reoccupied

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16. (C) While lane barrier/concrete obstacles remain at Yitzhar checkpoint, no soldiers were present January 5, and traffic passed freely in both directions. On January 7, however, the NSF reported that the IDF again manned Yitzhar checkpoint for several hours, but did not inspect all traffic. Yitzhar has been frequently mentioned by Palestinian contacts as an annoyance, as Palestinians must pass through checkpoints a short distance north/south of Yitzhar just to be stopped again at Yitzhar.

Huwwara: Age/Permit
Restrictions Lifted

17. (C) According to BG al-Asuli, Huwwara checkpoint continues to inspect 100 percent of travelers into/out of Nablus and does not generally permit passage of private cars. The permit requirement and age restrictions for males has been lifted, however. Poloff observed relatively efficient and expeditious inspection of Palestinians at Huwwara, with several men aged 16-45 (often previously denied passage) allowed access through the checkpoint, and wait times of only several minutes. No vehicles crossed Huwwara; 80-90 taxis for hire waited in rows on both sides of the checkpoint. Awarta and Bayt Furik checkpoints, also blocking roads into Nablus, were open for commercial transport only, but trucks entering/exiting Nablus only waited a few minutes before being allowed to proceed.

Jit CP Abandoned

18. (C) Abandonment of Jit checkpoint removes what Palestinian contacts have labeled a "harassment checkpoint" that they say does not serve a security purpose. Palestinian contacts noted that settler vehicles pass freely into Qedummim settlement, while Palestinians traveling toward Tulkarm, who already have passed a checkpoint to exit Ramallah, Salfit or Nablus, also faced long lines at Jit. Removal of this checkpoint, which was one of the 15

checkpoints President Abbas requested be removed, is a positive development in shortening transit times between Palestinian urban areas.

Bardalah: Back-to-Back Produce
Transfers Now Permitted

¶9. (C) BG al-Asuli told the ConGen January 7 that the Bardalah checkpoint in the northern Jordan Valley has been opened for back-to-back transfer of Palestinian agricultural goods only. While Palestinian farmers/produce transporters will still need to pass through at least one 100-percent inspection checkpoint before reaching Bardalah, they will now be able to transfer their produce for sale in Israeli markets.

Flying Checkpoints Still Used

¶10. (C) Abandonment of fixed checkpoints positively affects freedom of movement for Palestinians, but several Palestinian contacts note that the IDF often establishes flying checkpoints for short intervals in areas where fixed positions have been dismantled, and pulls over vehicles for random inspections. Poloff's vehicle and Palestinian vehicles on the same road were stopped by a flying checkpoint near Awarta checkpoint January 5, but passage of all vehicles was only delayed a couple minutes.

New Jerusalem-Area
Checkpoint at Jaba'a

¶11. (C) On January 6, the IDF reestablished a checkpoint between al-Ram and Jaba'a village (vicinity junction of Hwy 60 and Hwy 437) that had been abandoned, according to NSF contacts. This checkpoint creates a new obstacle for movement out of al-Ram, which is surrounded on three sides by the separation barrier, and out of Qalandiya Camp.

Comment

¶12. (C) These steps, if maintained, offer positive if limited improvements in internal Palestinian access and movement and ability to transport goods between Palestinian cities and villages. Most villages are still barricaded from primary highways, however, and access between cities usually

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still requires passage through multiple checkpoints and use of circuitous routes. The recent changes nonetheless shorten Palestinian travel in the West Bank, and reduce the number of redundant, intermediate checkpoints.
WALLES